

NCA

VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUND NO. 5-5992
FRED BROWN/NEW DELHI

JULY 13, 1978

INDIA - BANGLADESH GANGES MEETING

ANNCR:

A WEEK-LONG MEETING OF THE INDIA - BANGLADESH JOINT RIVERS COMMISSION HAS ENDED IN NEW DELHI WITHOUT DECIDING ON PROPOSALS FOR AUGMENTING THE FLOW OF THE GANGES RIVER. CORRESPONDENT FRED BROWN HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT:

VOICE:

THE COMMISSION HAS BEEN STUDYING RIVAL PROPOSALS PUT FORWARD BY THE TWO COUNTRIES IN CONFORMITY WITH LAST YEAR'S FARAKKA AGREEMENT. THAT AGREEMENT, WHICH ESTABLISHED A NEW FORMULA FOR SHARING WATER FROM THE GANGES RIVER DURING THE DRY SEASON, CALLED FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF LONG TERM PROPOSALS FOR AUGMENTING THE FLOW OF THE GANGES RIVER.

PROPOSALS BY THE TWO COUNTRIES WERE FORMALLY PRESENTED IN MARCH. INDIA PROPOSED A THREE-HUNDRED-TWENTY KILOMETER CANAL THAT WOULD LINK THE GANGES WITH THE BRAHMAPUTRA RIVER. THE INDIAN PLAN, WHICH HAS BEEN BILLED AS ONE OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST WATER MANAGEMENT PROJECTS, ALSO CALLS FOR CONSTRUCTION OF TWO HUGE STORAGE AND POWER DAMS IN THE INDIAN STATE OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH.

INDIAN OFFICIALS ARGUED THAT BOTH INDIA AND BANGLADESH WILL NOT ONLY BENEFIT FROM THE AUGMENTED FLOW OF WATER IN THE TWO RIVERS, BUT CAN SHARE IN THE ESTIMATED TEN MILLION KILOWATTS OF ELECTRIC POWER THAT WILL BE PRODUCED. AS A FURTHER BONUS, THE INDIANS SAY, THE ADDITIONAL FLOW OF WATER WILL MAKE ITS RIVERS NAVIGABLE FOR MOST OF THE YEAR.

WHILE LESS IS KNOWN OF THE BANGLADESH PROPOSAL, IT IS UNDERSTOOD TO RELY PRINCIPALLY ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF

RESERVOIRS IN THE UPPER REACHES OF THE GANGES INSIDE

BANGLADESH. BUT THE PRINCIPLE DIFFERENCE APPARENTLY IS THAT BANGLADESH WOULD LIKE TO INVOLVE OTHER COUNTRIES SUCH AS NEPAL AND WORLD ORGANIZATIONS LIKE THE WORLD BANK IN THE PROJECT.

INDIA REPORTEDLY INSISTS THAT THE SCHEME, AT LEAST IN THE EARLY STAGES, SHOULD BE CONDUCTED AS A BILATERAL PROJECT. THE INDIANS HAVE NO OBJECTIONS TO COORDINATING THE PROJECT IN A LARGER REGIONAL SCHEME LATER ON, BUT THEY FEEL THAT DIRECT BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN INDIAN AND BANGLADESH AS ENVISAGED IN THE FARAKKA ACCORD ARE THE BEST WAY TO GET THE PROJECT OFF THE GROUND.

APPARENTLY, THE ONLY THING TO COME OUT OF THE NEW DELHI MEETING WHICH HAD BEEN SCHEDULED IN APRIL BUT WAS POSTPONED THEN AT THE REQUEST OF BANGLADESH, WAS THE APPOINTMENT OF A COMMITTEE TO STUDY THE DIFFERING APPROACHES. THE COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS ARE TO BE PRESENTED AT THE NEXT MEETING OF THE JOINT COMMISSION IN DACCA IN SEPTEMBER.

JS/PY